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## Letter - G4. Signatory -Defenders of Wildlife.

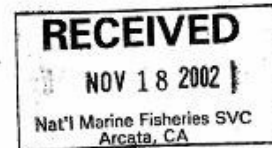


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**RE: Comments on Simpson Resource Company Aquatic Habitat Conservation Plan and Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances and Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

Defenders of Wildlife submits these comments regarding the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Authorization for Incidental Take and Implementation of a Multiple Species Aquatic Habitat Conservation Plan and Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances, Simpson Resource Company ("Simpson"), Del Norte and Humboldt Counties, California (DEIS) and the Aquatic Habitat Conservation Plan and Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (AHCP/CCAA).*

Defenders of Wildlife ("Defenders") is a 430,000 member private, non-profit, national wildlife conservation organization. Defenders works to protect all native wild animals and plants in their natural communities by advocating proactive approaches to wildlife conservation and encouraging protection of entire ecosystems and interconnected habitats. This letter is submitted on behalf of our 100,000 members in California.

Throughout this letter, we use the terminology adopted by the DEIS and AHCP/CCAA.

As set forth below, our review of the DEIS, AHCP and associated documents reveal the following:

- I. The DEIS and AHCP/CCAA are founded on an inappropriate baseline condition and thus lack consideration of a true "No Action Alternative.
- II. The AHCP/CCAA lacks a formal biological assessment of the viability of Covered Species.

Response to Comment G4-1

See Master Response 1 regarding the baseline, and Master Response 2 regarding the No Action Alternative.

Emphasis is placed on appropriate comparisons, e.g., between the No Action Alternative and existing environmental conditions in terms of habitat, species and riparian and aquatic ecosystem health and between the action alternatives, including the Proposed Action, and the No Action Alternative. Baseline conditions are set forth on an HPA-by-HPA basis in AHCP/CCAA Section 4.4 and EIS Chapter 3. There, the Plan and EIS describe and assess geologic and geomorphic factors and the current status of the covered species and their habitats. They discuss characteristic habitat types in each of the areas as well as existing factors that appear to be limiting for the covered species, their habitats, or the proper functioning of healthy aquatic/riparian ecosystems. Comparison of impacts associated with each of the alternatives is set forth in EIS Table 2.7-1. Timber harvesting and other forest management activities are evaluated in the EIS and AHCP/CCAA only to the extent that differences in their application and different environmental conditions would exist as a result of implementation of the AHCP/CCAA or one of the other alternatives.

Response to Comment G4-2

In "NEPA's 40 Most Frequently Asked Questions" (<http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/40>), the CEQ notes that the "No Action" alternative may be thought of in terms of continuing with actions where ongoing programs and activities (such as timber harvesting pursuant to the CFPRs) would continue, even as new plans are developed. In these cases, like for this Plan and these

- III. The conservation objections and measures of the AHCP/CCAA's Conservation Plan do not analyze biological relevance to the Covered Species.
- IV. The AHCP/CCAA generally lacks quantitative analyses throughout and instead relies on unsubstantiated claims.
- V. The overall impacts of the AHCP/CCAA on the Covered Species are not adequately assessed.
- VI. The DEIS and AHCP/CCAA conspicuously lack a cumulative effects analysis or any discussion of overall watershed/downstream effects of the proposed Plan.
- VII. Overall, the management prescriptions of the AHCP/CCAA are based primarily on current California Forest Practices regulations and are, as such, grossly insufficient in providing proactive conservation of the Covered Species.

I. INAPPROPRIATE BASELINE CONDITION AND LACK OF TRUE "NO ACTION" ALTERNATIVE

G4-1 [ As written, the baseline condition used for analysis in the DEIS and AHCP/CCAA is an extension of current logging practices into the future rather than the existing on-the-ground conditions in the environment. As such, the DEIS and AHCP/CCAA fail to analyze the significance of adverse impacts of the actual project - timber harvest and related activities under the AHCP/CCAA.

G4-2 [ Section 4 of the DEIS, "Environmental Consequences," is founded on this false baseline. When comparing all the alternatives, the underlying assumption is that all, including the "No Action" alternative, include perpetuation of current logging practices. For example, it is stated that "Under the Proposed Action, establishing EEZs would result in a reduction in Primary Assessment Area Locations potentially exposed to soil compaction from use of heavy equipment." Under a true No Action alternative, there would be no soil compaction from heavy equipment because logging would not occur. Another example: Section 4.3.3.2 "The Proposed Action's canopy closure requirements and tree retention standards are more protective than those that would be implemented under the No Action Alternative....the inner zone width along Class I watercourses is slightly less under the Proposed Action (50-70 feet) than under the No Action Alternative (75 feet)." In this case, not only is the No Action Alternative *clearly* not the true environmental baseline of no logging activities, but the Proposed Alternative actually decreases riparian protection from current status-quo levels. Therefore, the conclusion that "Overall, the conservation measures under the Proposed Action are anticipated to minimize the potential impacts that could otherwise result from altered hydrology in the Primary Assessment Area. They would reduce the impacts of forest management on surface runoff and peak flows, reduce soil compaction and disturbance, and maintain or enhance in-channel LWD" is made without any regard to or quantification of the actual impacts of timber harvesting and associated activities.

G4-3 [ The AHCP/CCAA glossary (Section 10) defines "Covered Activities" as "Certain activities



Permits, the No Action Alternative equates to “no change” from current management direction or level of management intensity. See Master Response 1 regarding baseline and Master Response 2 regarding the No Action Alternative.

#### Response to Comment G4-3

See Master Response 1, which identifies the most meaningful points of comparison for the assessment of potential impacts as “with the project” (Permit issuance and implementation of the Plan) and “without the project” (no Permits, no Plan). Under the “project”, issuance of the Permits and Plan implementation, the impacts of take identified in the Plan and the conservation measures identified in the Operating Conservation Program (AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2) would be carried out. For this reason, the Plan and EIS compare baseline conditions with the conditions that are expected to occur under the No Action Alternative, and the conditions that are expected to result from this combination of circumstances under the various action alternatives, including the Proposed Action, relative to the conditions that are expected to occur under the No Action Alternative. See AHCP/CCAA Sections 5 and 7 and EIS Chapter 4.

Response to Comment G4-4

AHCP/CCAA Section 5 discusses the potential impacts of incidental take on the covered species and their habitats that might occur as a result of timber harvesting and other forest management activities within forested landscapes if take were authorized but without the benefit of the Operating Conservation Program's prescriptions. The discussion in AHCP/CCAA Section 5 supplements the discussion in AHCP/CCAA Section 2 regarding the covered activities, AHCP/CCAA Section 3 regarding the covered species and their habitats, and AHCP/CCAA Section 4, which includes an HPA-by-HPA discussion of the current status of the covered species and their habitats. AHCP/CCAA Section 7, not Section 5, discusses the expected results for the covered species and their habitats of implementation of the Operating Conservation Program (AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2) in the Plan Area.

A summary of existing stream conditions and an assessment of their ability to support the covered species within the Primary Assessment Area is also presented in EIS Section 3.4.4 (Aquatic Habitat Conditions). The analysis of potential environmental consequences associated with implementation of the Proposed Action relative to the No Action Alternative and existing conditions is presented in EIS Chapter 4. As noted in EIS Section 4.4.3, the Services expect habitat conditions to improve under the Proposed Action and aquatic and riparian resources would realize incremental improvements compared to the No Action Alternative and current conditions. This would be largely attributable to implementation of the Road Management Plan, enhanced riparian zone protection, and other conservation measures, as a whole, which are described in EIS Chapter 2.2 as part of the Proposed

carried out by Simpson in the Plan Area that may result in incidental take of Covered Species and all those activities necessary to carry out the commitments reflected in the Plan's Operating Conservation Program and IA." Section 5.1 of the AHCP/CCAA explicitly lists some of these Covered Activities as the logging practices: "Of the Covered Activities, Simpson's timber harvesting operations and the road construction maintenance or use, as well as construction, maintenance and use of landings, culverts and crossings associated with such harvesting have the greatest potential to cause environmental effects – both individual and cumulative – which, in turn, could result in take of Covered Species." The DEIS only assesses the environmental impacts of the Conservation Plan, while ignoring the other Covered Activities. Thus, the DEIS falsely concludes that the "overall effect of implementation [of the proposed AHCP/CCAA] would result in net environmental benefits" without ever mentioning the impacts of the above Covered Activities that would be most detrimental to the Covered Species.

Over and over, the AHCP/CCAA admits that current practices endanger Covered Species: Section 5.5.2, regarding potential effects of increased temperature on Covered Species: "The potential impacts of such taking include potential reductions in the local or regional populations of the Covered Species and could affect a possible need to list currently unlisted Covered Species under the ESA in the future."; Section 5.5.3, on Altered Nutrient Input: "Take of Covered Species could occur as the result of temperature increases causing the impairment of essential function...[resulting in] potential reductions in the regional populations of the Covered Species." However, these detrimental practices are used inappropriately as a baseline for the AHCP/CCAA and DEIS assessments of environmental impact. While Simpson's timber management practices are covered in the Simpson Northern Spotted Owl HCP, they are not approved for the take of listed aquatic species and therefore must be addressed in the AHCP/CCAA. Especially since the current practices are admittedly detrimental to the Covered Species' populations, the misused baseline is all the more deplorable.

By failing to invoke the appropriate baseline condition and wrongly defining the "No Action alternative, the DEIS is in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA regulations require an EIS to "provide a full and fair discussion of significant environmental impacts." (40 C.F.R. 1502.1). In this case, the DEIS does not provide any discussion of the environmental impacts of the Covered Activities most likely to be detrimental to the Covered Species.

II. FORMAL VIABILITY ASSESSMENT LACKING

The AHCP/CCAA does not include an adequate assessment of current biological viability of the Covered Species in the Proposed Area. Section 4 details the Current Status of habitat and Covered Species with vague statements such as "Big Lagoon is believed to support a 'fair' population of coastal cutthroat trout" at best. When Simpson has conducted surveys, primarily for the amphibian species, they are based on a one time presence/ absence count which alone is not useful in indicating population trends. Without a formal assessment of the current biological viability of the Covered Species, it is impossible to assess the ability of the Conservation

Action. Overall, the minimization and mitigation measures are expected to reduce harvest and road-related sediment production and delivery to Primary Assessment Area streams and to maintain or enhance existing riparian and aquatic conditions. The anticipated improvement in riparian conditions and the reduction in sediment production and delivery to streams would occur in a shorter time than those expected under the No Action Alternative and would likely result in improved physical habitat for the seven covered fish species/ESUs and two covered amphibian species.

As noted in the response to Comment G4-1 above, under No Action Alternative for the Plan and the EIS, the Services would not issue the requested Permits and Green Diamond would not implement the Plan. As described in EIS Section 2.1, the No Action Alternative has been developed to evaluate current conditions. Under the No Action Alternative, existing activities would continue, including Green Diamond's current operations as governed by its NSO HCP and all applicable laws. See AHCP/CCAA Section 1.4. The most meaningful points of comparison, therefore, are with the project (issuance of the Permits and implementation of the Plan - the "Proposed Action") and without the project (no Permits, no Plan - the "No Action Alternative"). For the No Action Alternative, the appropriate comparison is between existing environmental conditions in terms of habitat, species and riparian and aquatic ecosystem health and the conditions that are expected to occur over time under the No Action Alternative. See Master Response 2 regarding the No Action Alternative and Master Response 1 regarding the baseline.

Please see responses to Comment G4-1 and G4-2 above.

#### Response to Comment G4-5

For the reasons discussed in response to Comment G4-3 and in Master Responses 1 and 2, and based on analysis provided in the EIS, the Services believe that the EIS does provide a full and fair discussion of significant environmental impacts associated with the covered activities as reflected in EIS Chapter 4 (Environmental Consequences).

Regarding the comparison between current conditions and the No Action Alternative, and among the action alternatives and the No Action Alternative, see EIS Chapter 4 (Environmental Consequences).

#### Response to Comment G4-6

By "biological viability" this comment seems to imply that the current species' status within the Plan Area and the current condition of the species' habitats, are not adequately described in the Plan, such that the Services or commenters can determine the impacts of taking and, thus, whether such impacts are adequately mitigated. The Services disagree and believe that the baseline conditions of the covered species and habitats are adequately described in the Plan. See, for example, AHCP/CCAA Sections 3 and 4. Master Response 8 sets forth the approval criteria for this AHCP/CCAA and Master Response 1 discusses the baseline conditions and their role in ESA analyses.

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Response to Comment G4-7

See Master Response 12. Further, as stated in AHCP/CCAA Section 6.1.2, the covered activities all share some common habitat needs. Those certain biological needs that are common to the covered species, which were considered in developing the goals and objectives for the conservation program, include cool water temperatures and complex stream habitat morphology and substrates. The AHCP/CCAA Section 6.1.2 briefly describes components of each of the covered species' life history, which also were considered when developing the biological goals and objectives for the Operating Conservation Program. A discussion of the key life history traits and biological requirements for each of the covered species are discussed in detail in AHCP/CCAA Section 3.2 and each species' key habitat requirements are discussed in AHCP/CCAA Section 3.3. A more detailed discussion of these life histories and habitat characteristics are provided in Appendix A of the AHCP/CCAA.

From the discussion of the purpose of the Plan (AHCP/CCAA Section 1.2) which states that the "...purposes of the AHCP/CCAA are for...providing for the conservation of the individuals..." and the five specific biological goals bulleted and shown in AHCP/CCAA Section 6.1.2.1, it is clear that the needs of the covered species were the basis of the Operating Conservation Program measures, which were developed to minimize the impact of incidental take on the covered species. Furthermore, of the five biological objectives, three were directly based on habitat needs for the covered species (e.g. summer water temperature, LWD recruitment, and sediment delivery) and one was based on population (amphibian populations). The Operating Conservation Program measures, based on the goals and objectives, are expected

G4-6

Measures to assess the current threats posed by the Covered Activities. Consequentially, it is also impossible to adequately judge the potential success of the ACHP/CCAA to minimize and mitigate the impacts of timber harvesting activities on the Covered Species. Therefore, without an adequate assessment, any conclusions drawn by federal decision makers that are based on this AHCP/CCAA and DEIS will be arbitrary and capricious.

III. BIOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF CONSERVATION PLAN NOT ADDRESSED

G4-7

The biological goals and objectives presented in Section 6.1 of the AHCP/CCAA are not linked to the biology of the Covered Species. Section 6.1.1 states: "to minimize and mitigate the impacts of incidental take within the Plan Area as described in this AHCP and to ensure that such take does not jeopardize the Covered Species, Simpson intends to undertake management measures that will, during the term of the Permit protect, and where needed allow development of the functional habitat conditions that are required for long-term survival to support well-distributed, viable populations of the Covered Species." However, in the two pages that follow, all of these goals and objectives are set out without justification of how they address the needs of the Covered Species. For example, the summer water temperature objective is based on the current levels of temperature found in the Plan Area. As discussed in I. above, the use of this degraded system as a baseline is inappropriate and biologically invalid. The sediment delivery objectives are not tied to the habitat needs of the Covered Species. The sediment delivery studies in Simpson Hydrographic Planning Areas (HPAs) must tie sediment delivery volumes to habitat degradation, stasis or improvement. Further, the assumption that reducing road-related sediment by 70% from current levels is adequate to avoid road-related jeopardy to the covered species is impossible to assess give the lack of ecological basis for such a standard. The appropriate objective for slope stability measures is to prevent alteration of the natural landslide regime. Given this ecological basis, the fact that the AHCP/CCAA still allows new roadbuilding in riparian areas and on landslide-prone locations is potentially significantly detrimental the biological status of the Covered Species. The AHCP/CCAA fails to address this. Appendix E does, however, provide information that current levels of management-related erosion increase the watershed scale level of erosion between 30 and 300% beyond natural conditions. Although not directly linked to biological significance, one would assume that such a large level of increased erosion will have a detrimental effect on the Covered Species. As such, this effect must be addressed in the AHCP/CCAA.

G4-8

G4-9

G4-10

G4-11

G4-12

As another case in point, the riparian management measures specifically fail to address the needs of the Covered Species. For example, the importance of creating unharvested streamside areas and retaining the largest trees are not addressed. It is particularly important for the amphibian species to create and maintain interior or "core" areas of riparian forest where conditions are suitable for cold-water adapted amphibians. Wide no-cut buffers of 30 meters or more are necessary to provide the microclimate required by the adult life stages of the tailed frog and southern torrent salamander. (Welsh et al. 2000). As currently proposed, timber harvest is allowed in all streamside riparian management zones (RMZs), explicitly ignoring the biological needs of the Covered Species.

to minimize and mitigate any impacts of incidental take on the ITP species and, with respect to the covered ESP species, to comply with the CCAA standards. See Master Response 8.

Response to Comment G4-8

See Master Response 1

Response to Comment G4-9

See Master Responses 1 regarding baseline conditions, and Master Response 17 regarding road density.

Response to Comment G4-10

To clarify, implementation of the Operating Conservation Program is not intended to result in a 70 percent reduction in sediment delivery from roads or management-related landslides, but a 70% reduction in management-related sediment delivery from landslides in the SSS zones. The Services recognize AHCP/CCAA Section 6.1.2.2.4, Number 2, which states as the Plan's biological objective: "Achieve a 70 percent reduction in sediment delivery from management-related landslides in harvested steep streamside slopes compared to delivery volumes from appropriate reference areas within clearcut stands." However, the Services also recognize that, for the reasons discussed in Master Response 12, biological goals and objectives are not themselves enforceable in this Plan. This said, the Plan does not propose to reduce road related sediment delivery by 70 percent. By the end of the term of the Permits, road-related sediment is expected to be reduced by 90% (AHCP/CCAA Appendix F). The various elements of the road program, including risk assessment, watershed and sub-watershed prioritization, road assessment, and the implementation standards are described in AHCP/CCAA Sections 6.2.3 and 6.3.3. The riparian conservation measures in AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2.1 do not allow road construction to occur in RMZs with the exception of very specific reasons that must be explained and justified (see AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2.3.11.5). Additionally, there are specific measures in the Plan to avoid new road construction on all MWPZs (i.e., steep streamside slopes, headwall swales and deep seated landslides) and shallow rapid landslides.

Response to Comment G4-11

See response to Comment G4-7.

Appendix E of the AHCP/CCAA states that recent TMDL studies found a 30% - 300% increase in erosion due to timber management influences during the period since the CFPRs were enacted. The Plan cites that these results should be viewed with caution owing to the different scales and methods employed on each of these studies. Further caution is advised in comparing these results to actual current forest management impacts due to annual incremental increases in protection provided by the evolving rules. For example, the Threatened and Impaired rule package (14 CCR 916.9) was passed in 2000, which means the past 4 years of standard practices are more conservative than the previous 25 years of standard practices. Also, although the studies were reported to cover the period of only the last 30 years, it is likely that residual legacy impacts were unknowingly or inadvertently included in the data, such as, for example, sedimentation from a poorly placed road (either by surface erosion or mass wasting) that would not be permitted (or even proposed) under current standards of practice. This example reinforces the caution of extrapolating results due to different methodologies of data collection and study design. Lastly, the Plan proposes to minimize and mitigate the impact of take with a suite of conservation measures (AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2), including, among others, aggressive road management measures (AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2.3) and riparian management measures (AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2.1). The Services believe that implementation of the Operating Conservation Program as a whole will meet the ESA Section 10(a) Permit issuance criteria, which are discussed in AHCP/CCAA Section 1.4.1 and Master Response 8.

Response to Comment G4-12

See response to Comment G3-44 and Master Response 18. Further, site specific survey data collected within the Plan Area and those of Diller and Wallace (1996 and 1999), all presented in AHCP/CCAA Appendix C11, indicate that the covered amphibian species do not require wide no-cut buffers. Therefore, the Services believe that the buffers for RMZs as provided for in AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2.1 are expected to adequately protect the covered amphibian species.



Response to Comment G4-13

All Plan measures were reviewed to ensure that such subjectivity would not exist as to make implementation difficult or the Plan itself unenforceable. The Plan has extensive analytical support and an objective and sound rationale for the Plan's conclusions (see generally AHCP/CCAA Sections 2 through 5 and the Appendices) and the resulting measures contained in the Operating Conservation Program (AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2). The AHCP/CCAA Section 7 analyzes the effectiveness of the Plan's conservation strategy. The AHCP/CCAA Section 7's analysis extends the AHCP/CCAA Section 4's assessment of the current conditions for the covered species in the area where the Plan will be implemented and the AHCP/CCAA Section 5's assessment of the potential impacts of covered activities that may result in take and the types of effects that such take may have on covered species. In AHCP/CCAA Section 7, all possible impacts of take that may occur are examined, together with their relative significance to each of the covered species by category and in relation to all potential impacts and measures.

Response to Comment G4-14

The commenter referred to a workshop that was held on March 18 and 19, 1999. The statistician the commenter refers to presented mean bankfull widths for Cañon Creek, indicating that the mean bankfull width increased from 47.4 feet in 1995 to 62.1 feet in 1996. The statistician indicated that this statistically significant increase in mean bankfull width was a result of a large flood event with approximately a 10 year recurrence interval. The statistician did not indicate that, during the course of the study, the channel

G4-13 Overall, the AHCP/CCAA invokes extremely subjective, discretionary provisions with no analysis of how the measures would impact the Covered Species.

VI. LACK OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS THROUGHOUT

G4-14 The AHCP/CAA lacks any quantitative analysis and is instead replete with broad, unsubstantiated statements. The following excerpts from Section 7 are illustrative: "The increased pool habitat will help avoid displacement or minimize the effects of displacement of juvenile salmonids caused by peak flows," and "Over time, this conservation measure will increase the amount of LWD in streams, which will ultimately increase overwintering habitat for juvenile salmonids. Large woody debris recruitment will mitigate the impacts of displacing Covered Species that results from altered hydrology by providing increased habitat alternatives for juveniles that are displaced during a storm event." These statements beg the questions: How much pool habitat will be increased? What will the peak flows levels be? Will the increase in pool habitat be enough to mitigate the altered peak flows so that the necessary natural/ biological conditions are met? How much LWD will be increased in the streams? How does this compare to natural quantities of LWD? What type of altered hydrology, in what quantities will occur? Will the amount of increased habitat alternatives be enough to maintain populations of juveniles?

G4-15 Other general questions unanswered by the AHCP/CCAA are: How do the management goals compare quantitatively with the current regulatory statutes that Simpson is already beholdant to by state and federal law? What are the effects of current management practices on the Covered

G4-16 Species in the Plan Area? How will the each specific conservation management practice address the impacts of Covered Activities on the Covered Species? These crucial questions are not answered anywhere in the AHCP/CCAA or the DEIS. The strongest approach at causal language relating practices under the Proposed Plan to effects on Covered Species are illustrated in this example from Section 5.3.4 "Negative effects of excess course sediment on pool habitat are believed to be potentially significant for the salmonid Covered Species." This lack of quantitative analysis is simply unacceptable and all broad conclusion about the impact of the Covered Activities on the Covered Species are grossly unsubstantiated.

G4-17 DEIS Section 4, Environmental Consequences: "The conservation measures under the Proposed Action are anticipated to minimize the potential impacts that could otherwise result from altered hydrology in the Promary Assessment Area. They would reduce the impacts of forest managment on surface runoff and peak flows, reduce soil compaction and disturbance, and maintain or enhance in-channel LWD. Any impacts to hydrology and water quality that would occur would be mitigated by improved riparian conditions resulting from riparian management and decreased sediment production and delivery, as described below." Unfortunately, the following discussion does not contain the necessary quantification of impacts on the Covered Species. Therefore, the general conclusions of no negative effects that the DEIS claims are unsubstantiated.

increased to 150 feet as the commenter indicated. The channel shift that occurred in the Mad River in 1998 has extended the low flow confluence of Cañon Creek further downstream which may limit early access of anadromous salmonids. However, data submitted by Green Diamond in support of its Plan indicates that since the 1996 flood event, anadromous salmonid access into Cañon Creek has occurred, including coho salmon, even in low flow years. See AHCP/CCAA Section 4.4.8.7.1.

#### Response to Comment G4-15

The ESA does not require a quantification of conservation benefits for ITPs, but instead that a Permit applicant's conservation program minimize and mitigate the impacts of authorized incidental take of covered species that may result from covered activities "to the maximum extent practicable" (50 CFR 17.32(b)(2)(i)(B)). See Master Response 9. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses are acceptable and desirable in the context of an HCP/CCAA (*National Wildlife Federation v. Babbitt*, 128 F.Supp.2d 1274, 1291 [2000]). The management measures Green Diamond has elected to include in its Operating Conservation Program are set forth in AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2 and the biological goals and objectives upon which they have been developed are set forth in AHCP/CCAA Section 6.1. Implementation of the Operating Conservation Program will minimize and mitigate the impacts of incidental take as described in the Plan and ensure that such take does not jeopardize the continued existence of the covered species and will protect and, where needed, allow development of the functional habitat conditions that are required for long-term survival to support well-distributed, viable populations of the covered species. Further, the Plan will meet the ESP/CCAA standards set forth in the AHCP/CCAA Section 1.4.1 and in Master Response 8 with regard to the unlisted covered species subject to USFWS jurisdiction. Accordingly, the Operating Conservation Program (AHCP/CCAA Section 6.2) complies with current regulatory requirements. Further, approval of the Plan and issuance of the Permits fits into a larger context that includes, among other things, the CFPRs and other State law, Green Diamond's NSO HCP and other conservation efforts. See AHCP/CCAA Section 1.4.

#### Response to Comment G4-16

AHCP/CCAA Section 7 specifically describes how the conservation measures will address the impacts of taking on the covered species and describes the expected effectiveness of the measures to achieve their purposes. The measures included in the Operating Conservation Program are considered as a whole, rather than separating out the benefits of each measure. In addition, as stated in AHCP/CCAA Section 1.4.2, Green Diamond's current management practices fall under the guidance of CFPRs and Green Diamond's NSO HCP. See AHCP/CCAA Section 1.4.3. In addition, Green Diamond's management practices are subject to other resource conservation efforts including the Salmon Creek Management Plan and the Management Strategies for the Little River Watershed, and cooperative agreements such as those with the Yurok Tribe and the Coastal Conservancy, Redwood National Park and other agreements as outlined in AHCP/CCAA Section 1.4.4. The net effect of these management practices is that significant protection currently is being provided to the covered species, water quality and aquatic habitats. Quantification of benefits has been provided where possible. For example, the Plan predicts that measures to treat high- and moderate-risk sites in the road implementation plan will stabilize approximately 48 percent of the road-related sediment in the first 15 years of the Plan, as opposed to only 19 percent without the Plan. It is not known how much pool habitat will be increased as a direct result of the reduction of sediment inputs to the stream, and the ESA does not require the Services to quantify the benefits to the covered species covered by the Permits, as long as the criteria for Permit issuance have been met. (See also Master Response 8.) In other words, the Plan as a whole, including each of the individual measures, will supplement existing mechanisms to protect the covered species and their habitats in the Plan Area over the term of the Plan and Permits.

#### Response to Comment G4-17

The text of the EIS quoted in the comment is from the description of environmental consequences on hydrology and water quality (EIS Section 4.3). Accordingly, it would not be appropriate to include a discussion of the impacts on the covered species in this Section. In contrast, the discussion of potential impacts to aquatic resources (EIS